

## ***Abraham Lincoln — Spielberg's fiction v historical fact***

Abraham Lincoln has gone down in history as the Great Emancipator, but the real Lincoln was far from the saintly figure he is portrayed today.



The new [Steven Spielberg film](#) *Lincoln* has received much critical acclaim, as has the man himself. Abraham Lincoln is remembered today as the man who freed the slaves, albeit at the cost of fighting a bloody civil war. As usual though, things were not that simple.

Writing in the *Daily Telegraph*, January 12, 2013, the historian Alan Sked says “Abraham Lincoln was a racist who deliberately started a war that killed more than 650,000 people...He had no intention of freeing slaves, who freed themselves by fleeing to Unionist lines during a war that was going badly for the North and in which they became needed as recruits.”

He continues “In September 1863, Lincoln’s preliminary emancipation proclamation declared that the South could keep its slaves if it returned to the Union.”

He concludes with the observation that Lincoln’s solution to the so-called Negro problem was to repatriate blacks to Africa.

Lincoln made his position on the race issue clear in his own pronouncements. The following are cited from the 9 volume *THE COLLECTED WORKS OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN*, Editor in Chief Roy P. Basler, published by Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, (1953).

Volume III, 1858-1860, [pages 145-6](#): “I will say then that I am not nor ever have been in favor of bringing about in any way the social and political equality of the white and black races, [applause]—that I am not, nor ever have been in favor of making voters or jurors of negroes, nor of qualifying them to hold office, nor to intermarry with white people; and I will say in addition to this that there is a physical difference between the white and black races which I believe will for ever forbid the two races living together on terms of social and political equality. And inasmuch as they cannot so live, while they do remain together there must be the position of superior and inferior, and I as much as any other man am in favor of having the superior position assigned to the white race.” (This was from the 4<sup>th</sup> Lincoln debate with Stephen A. Douglas, September 18, 1858, three years before the outbreak of the American Civil War).

Here he is again: “...I do not perceive that because the white man is to have the superior position the negro should be denied everything. I do not understand that because I do not want a negro woman for a slave I must necessarily want her for a wife. [Cheers and laughter.] My understanding is that I can just let her alone. I am now in my fiftieth year, and I certainly never have had a black woman for either a slave or a wife. So it seems to me quite possible for us to get along without making either slaves or wives of negroes.”

And “I will to the very last stand by the law of this State, which forbids the marrying of white people with negroes.”

This was made to a deputation of free Negroes on August 14, 1862: (Volume V, 1861-1862, [page 371](#)): "...why, he asked, should the people of your race be colonized, and where? Why should they leave this country? This is, perhaps, the first question for proper consideration. You and we are different races. We have between us a broader difference than exists between almost any other two races. Whether it is right or wrong I need not discuss, but this physical difference is a great disadvantage to us both, as I think your race suffer very greatly, many of them by living among us, while ours suffer from your presence. In a word, we suffer on each side. If this is admitted, it affords a reason at least why we should be separated."

One more quote will suffice: "See our present condition—the country engaged in war!—our white men cutting one another's throats, none knowing how far it will extend; and then consider what we know to be the truth. But for your race among us there could not be war, although many men engaged on either side do not care for you one way or the other." He went on to appeal for separation.

These statements are crystal clear, but Alan Sked's bland assertion that Lincoln was a *racist* needs to be seen in its proper historical context.

The very concept of *racism* did not exist at that time, and Lincoln's views on race were very much mainstream. That being said, Lincoln's claim that we can all just "get along" does tend to suggest that he was not inherently anti-black. There is absolutely no reason people can't get along without fraternising socially. Many of the great social reformers of the past were from the upper classes, and they didn't generally rub shoulders with us plebs – as Andrew Mitchell didn't say!

Leaving that aside, every right thinking person from time immemorial has known that slavery is inherently wrong, but slavery and *racism* are two entirely different things.

Also, the claim that blacks freed themselves by fleeing the Unionist lines is not the whole story.

The Underground Railroad was founded early in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, and assisted blacks to escape to the North from Southern plantations. The idea that blacks freed themselves on their own terms is a fantasy perpetuated by Marxist organisations and publications to this day. Although the name William Wilberforce is best known in this connection today, there were many others who fought against slavery (which was never limited to blacks), including in the New World.

So what of the claim that Lincoln was in effect a mass murderer? This is what Charley Rees called [the facts about rebellion](#). Any government that is faced with an insurgency or large scale violent upheaval will react in a similar manner; right or wrong, this is what is happening in Syria today.

As for Lincoln's suggestion that blacks should be repatriated to Africa, this was nothing new, indeed the [American Colonisation Society](#) was established with that aim as early as 1816. The African nation of Liberia was founded for that specific purpose.

The fact that relatively few chose to leave and that today people from all nations choose to emigrate to the United States rather than to Africa speaks louder by far than those who sit behind their state of the art computers churning out polemics against the wicked *racists* who control the Promised Land.

That doesn't mean that America is perfect, indeed like most of the rest of the world it appears to be sleepwalking into disaster, because today we are all enslaved by another, and even more pernicious master, the dictatorship of finance. Like his illustrious predecessors, Abraham Lincoln realised this, and instead of borrowing money at usurious rates of interest, he printed his own. Some claim that was the real reason he was assassinated by John Wilkes Booth in April 1865, but that's another story. And maybe one for Spielberg to tackle with his usual disrespect for historical truth.

**[The above op-ed was first published January 13, 2013 (London time), not January 12 as indicated [here](#). I have corrected some very minor textual errors and have added four pages (in two PDF files) from the collected works of Lincoln, the ones that contain the quotes cited here. The second includes page 372 of Volume 5 as well as page 371.]**